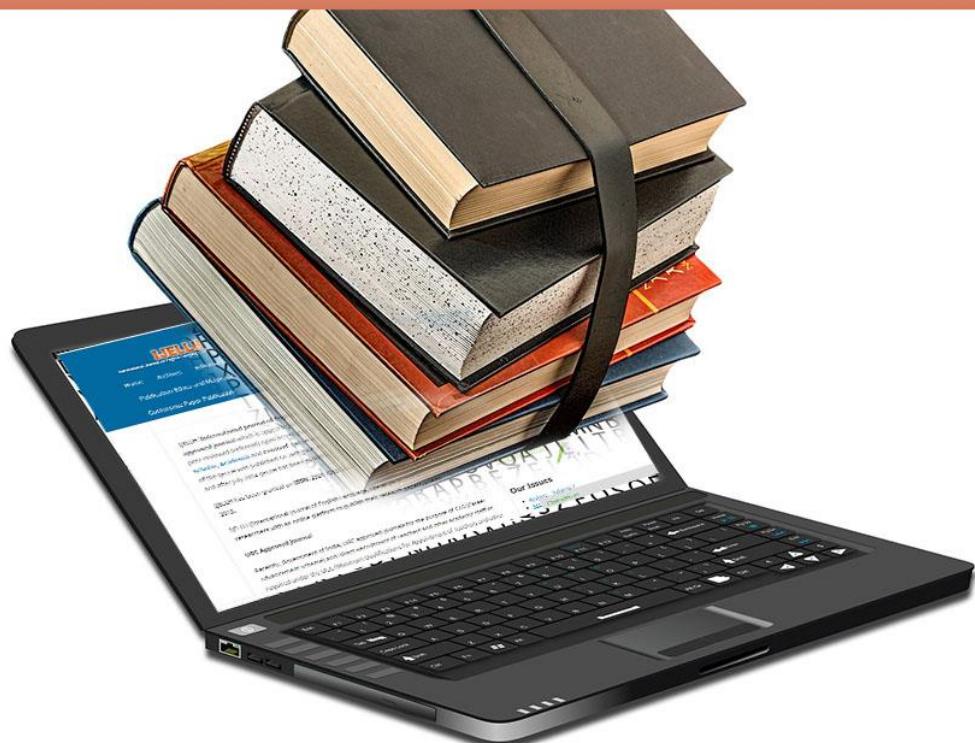


**ISSN**INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH****International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal

**Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019**[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

Dr. A. Kala,  
Associate professor of English,  
TGA&SC,  
Pondicherry, India  
[devihariharan79@gmail.com](mailto:devihariharan79@gmail.com)

## Indian Marriage – The Constant and the Changing Aspects A Study of Karnad's Wedding Album

### Abstract

Indian English Drama found its potentials in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the hands of great playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and Grish Karnad and has been evolving into a powerful medium for expressing thought- social and political, conspicuous and the subtle, acquiring new dimensions and magnificence. Dattani and Karnad have been sharpening their pens experimenting with new techniques, ever expanding the scope of the stage play.

Karnad has been writing for the Indian stage for more than five decades now. His plays have focused on contemporary issues. Karnad uses myths, folk lores and history for the basic story line, approaching the contemporary through them. His play from '*Thughlag*' to the '*Fire and the Rain*' have either a historical or a mythical background. His latest play '*Wedding Album*', however, is an exception because it tells the story of an urban middle class family in India, without history or mythical background.

Key words: contemporary issues,

## Introduction

Through ‘*Wedding Album*’ Karnad takes us into the inner courtyard of the Nadkarni family. The youngest daughter of Mr. Nadkarni is about to get married. It is an arranged marriage as it is in majority of the cases in Brahmin families. Ashwin, the bridegroom is settled in U.S and is of the same caste. The entire marriage process is done through video playback and the bridegroom will reach only just before a week for the marriage. Though the parents are worried about the disappointingly short visit of the groom, they go on with the preparations. Rohit, Vidula’s brother, takes care of all the communication and planning and Hema, Vidula’s sister, is there to help mom at home in receiving people and other activities to be taken care of.

In a crisp well-knit plot Karnad brings in the story of many marriages, scrutinizing the personal and social aspects that go into the arrangement. The concept of arranged marriage which is so rooted and held high in Indian families and the extent to which people go to defend, protect and promote it, is brought under Karnad’s microscopic glass. To preserve the endogamous aspect and to find a suitable match for the girls / boys from within the caste is chiefly the aim behind most of the Indian arranged marriages. To maintain one’s rung in the social ladder or to climb one step up is another guiding principle behind these marriages. For men and women, it is more a duty towards family and community. Kapadia observed in the sixties that “Marriage was a social duty towards the family and community and there was little idea of individual interest”(169) and surprisingly the situation has not changed much, and it is still not considered a private affair. They are mostly endogamous and inter caste marriages are generally discouraged in many communities.

Shankar Rao points out that the Hindu marriage has undergone radical changes especially after independence. Even though the basic religious beliefs associated with marriage have not crumbled down, many of its practices, customs and forms have changed. Marriages

have become grand. Much money is spent on marriage. The changes are many, but Rao points out three significant changes in the Hindu marriage:

The Hindu women today marry not very much for performing religious duties but for lifelong companionship.

The marital relationships are no longer treated as unbreakable or irrevocable as divorce is socially and legally permissible.

The ideal of *pativrata* has lost its significance for there is legal provision for widow remarriage and divorce.(114)

But these changes have not come about uniformly in all castes and classes and some communities still hold on to the earlier notions and continue to think of marriage more as a religious sacrament than as a social contract. This stubborn holding on to the traditional notions ignoring the major changes in the social set up is the fountain spring of social evils and miseries. Inequal marriages, honour killings, divorces and broken families result from the unwillingness to adapt to the changing situations.

*Wedding Album* features the married life of some other couples along with that of Vidula. Hema is married and settled in Australia and has two children. It may be construed that she is well settled and must be happy, but to her, it is a life without personal achievements. She had to be moving along with her husband on his transfers. She grumbles, “Indian women are obedient Sati Savitris ever willing to follow in husband’s footsteps. Look at me- Melbourne, Singapore, and now Sydney. Our men may get all the top jobs. But I am in no better position than Ma. (WA 17) Rohit had to marry Tapasya because of the in-family forces. Tapasya is a “suitable” bride according to his relatives, suitable in every way since she had education and status and belonged to the same community. Tapasya’s parents convince and almost force Rohit to marry Tapasya. Pratibha, the editor of the TV serial under whom Rohit is working has married a Muslim ten years elder to her because he offered her “affection and security” (WA

61) Pratibha thinks that the man and woman should know each other and they should decide for themselves. Apart from these marriages which form the part of main discussion, there are other marriages too which are mentioned in comparison.

Vidula's marriage with Ashwin is a decision involving a lot of risk. Hema and Rohit advise Vidula that she should be bold enough to think of a divorce if the marriage does not work out. But Vidula is already conditioned by the family and the community and the desire to find a suitable man working abroad, decides that the marriage would work well for her".

Hema: Now that you are going there, we are sure everything will be alright. We are absolutely certain. But if things don't quite work out, if you find you cannot live with him.....

Vidula: Why shouldn't I be able to live with him?

Rohit: Don't be obtuse. He has not exactly been over communicative. Barely half-a-dozen short emails in all these weeks. Hardly any calls(WA 86).

Vidula represents Indian women who enter into married life with the collective consciousness of compromise and adjustment. Woman's negation of the self is an important feature of arranged marriages in India and the foundation of the family set up. Hema has reconciled to a life of sacrifice moving along with her husband on his transfers without thinking of her personal achievement for the sake of the children.

Karnad brings into focus the change in ideologies that come out of education globalization and technology and legislation. Hema is living in Australia where women are more independent and the marriage bond is not one of life time. Indians who go abroad naturally compare the situation in both the places and grumble about the compromises they have to make but are not daring enough to bring in a change.

Indians living abroad are influenced by the independent decision taken both by the men and woman there, and desire that life style. Hema's unhappy comment about her own life reveals her dissatisfaction about the life style of Indian women.

Ashwin's report about his achievements and his life abroad discloses his assimilation of western culture. Likewise, through Vidula's visit to the Internet café where she engages in conversation with just a voice deriving sexual pleasure and satisfying her sexual urge Karnad reveals the secret pages of her life and challenges generalizations. While showing how corrupting the invasion of a few evil minds over the society through technology could be, he also portrays the consequences of the onslaught of unregularized, uncontrolled use of net through internet cafés and the independence available in the present world which could have a sway over the younger generation. As Vidula's family do not know much about Ashwin, Ashwin also does not know much about Vidula. The success of this marriage relies purely on chance though they might belong to the same caste and might have equal status.

Karnad problematizes the psychological and sociological risks involved in continuing the old pattern- to strive to keep up endogamous marriages and to force fit it on children who live in different situations and follow different cultures.

In a thin play he has touched upon many aspects of Indian marriages delineating the cultural aspects and the financial strains involved, inviting and receiving people, the conversations and the debates and dilemma. The traditional, arranged marriages in India used to be a leisurely affair taking a span of at least 3 months from the engagement. That helped either family to know more about each other. But the present marriages are planned and conducted fast. Hence some of these marriages turn out to be failures, more so in the case of marriages where the girl has to go abroad.

Karnad juxtaposes the life of Rahdabai's daughter who simply is 'maintained' by a rich trader for some time and then thrown into ditch, with that of Vidula's marriage where the

parents, for the sake of caste and status, risk sending their daughter abroad with a man they don't know much about. Pratiba finds it difficult to believe that Vidula is prepared to marry a man whom she has never met.

Pratibha: A girl from an educated family- a graduate-agrees to consider marrying a man whom she has never met. The boy turns up, all ready to jump on to the altar, without ever having seen her. In this day and age (WA 8)?

According to Karnad, both the decisions are equally unwise. He suggests that the present social situation demands a careful reconsideration of the earlier notions. Women have become more independent due to education and globalization and hence parents should become more open minded and see the pros and cons of their decisions. Karnad exhibits some of the serious problems in the modern marriages where caste affinity and financial status take the place of love and understanding. *Wedding Album* is a testimony of Karnad's acute sensitivity of the radical changes in the Indian society and the need for a broader outlook

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